

THE MAMMALS AND BIRDS OF KASHMIR AND THE  
ADJACENT HILL PROVINCES

BEING

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

BY

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PART VII

(Continued from page 11 of Vol. XXXI)

Family—*Hyænidæ*

Genus—HYÆNA

This group is in India represented by

The Striped Hyæna—*Hyæna striata*

Vernacular names.—‘*Lakha-bagh*, or *bagha Lakra*’—and most commonly ‘*Chirak* and *Jhirak*’.

*Colour*.—Darkish grey, sometimes of a brownish hue, traversed with tawny stripes, these are often of a blackish-brown colour, and are on the body and limbs.

*Dimensions*.—Head and body about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet, tail with hair under  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet. Skull of a large male 8" basal length, zygomatic measurements 6.1". Weight 63 lbs. This specimen was shot near the Jumna bridge at Kalsi in the Western Dun.

It is not often that a hyæna can be weighed as the carcase is left as a rule when shot.

*Distribution*.—Very rare in Kashmir but has been found on the Murree road and in Hammel. It is fairly common in some of the hill districts with which we are concerned, and practically throughout India.

*Habits*.—It is not uncommon to turn hyænas out of short grass whilst beating with elephants in the Terai; on more than one occasion I have shot hyænas within a few feet of the elephant's trunk, killing dead with a charge of large shot. A big hyæna was very troublesome in a cattle-breeding farm. I camped in the farm and spent two days looking for the animal and eventually got close to it. It was eating the body of a calf within a few yards of the sheds, and to my intense surprise I killed it dead with a charge of No. 5.

Whilst staying with a regiment in a Musketry Camp in the hills, there was a good deal of trouble with the very disagreeable cries of hyænas at night. We used to turn out with guns, but although we saw the animals we were unable to shoot owing to the tents being so

close together. They occupied any small and convenient patch of ground nearby inspite of the fact that in camp were several dogs which the men used to loose after barking deer or jackals.

We were sitting in the mess tent after our meal, when we heard the men urging on their dogs. The sides of the tents were up and we were just turning out to see what was afoot, when a hyæna rushed under the table and bolted out at the other side! Beyond a chair being broken no harm was done. The hyæna ran down a ravine followed by the dogs, but apparently they did not care to face it.

Dogs, unless very wary, are apt to be greatly mutilated by hyænas; with their powerful jaws they can crush the leg of any dog.

Hyænas can be ridden down on a fast pony which is handy at turning.

The fossils in the Siwalik Hills and elsewhere in the vicinity point to there having been other species of the Hyænidæ in India, and it is believed that *H. cræata* was amongst these. Besides these above, fossils have been found in Madras. In certain parts of the submontane districts, a class of hyænas exists which are small, and are far less striped than those of the lower Punjab hills—these are only a local variety of *striata*, the only species now found in India.

#### ORDER—CYNOIDEA.

Family—*Canidæ*: Dogs, Wolves, Jackals, Foxes.

The differences in the footprint of a dog and a cat consist in the two central toe pads in the former being in advance of the side pads, making the footprint longer, and in the presence always of blunt nail prints, owing to the claws being non-retractile. The dentition consists amongst other teeth of four upper and lower premolars respectively whilst the cat has three premolars in the upper jaw and two in the lower jaw.

The genera are known as *Canis*, *Cyon* and *Vulpes*.

*Canis* includes the wolves, *Cyon* the wild dogs, *Vulpes* the foxes.

#### The Wolf—*Canis lupus*

Vernacular names.—*Ratnakin* in Kashmir—*Chanku* in Tibetan—*Baglura* in many jungles, where this name is given to both the Panther and Wolf.

*Colour*.—Wolf skins are not as variable in colouration as is generally supposed to be the case. Nearly all Tibetan wolves are grey or greyish-white with slaty under fur; some show a brownish tinge mixed with white hairs. The tail is tipped with black. A few wolves are black due to melanism. Brownish-black wolves of the colour sometimes shown by a wild cat as far as I know are rarely seen.

I have seen a black and a grey wolf with the same mother. Doubtless as was the case with the wolves which have been brought home to England, black cubs have been born from a black parent.

Alsatian hounds have been bred with wolves; the cubs are apt to fight amongst themselves, but are quite tame and affectionate to their owners. These cross-bred hounds are often difficult to rear,

they are great feeders, and are very delicate during the first year of their lives in India.

*Distribution.*—The species *C. laniger* is from Tibet and Ladak; the pelts sold in Srinagar are those of this class.

*Habits.*—Wolves are by no means nocturnal although they rest during the heat of the day. I have seen a she-wolf stand for hours in the scorching sun of Ladak, with her cubs secreted in the hills behind her, she was doing sentry-go between her offspring and the intruders.

Wolves carry portions of their prey to their caves; I doubt the wolf being much of a carrion feeder for the simple reason that they hunt in small packs and eat all the flesh of the animals they have killed, and leave the bones to be picked by carrion-eating birds. I cannot say much regarding the habits of *Canis lupus*; they are rarely seen except when travelling.

*Dimensions* of a very large Tibetan wolf: Head and Body 3' 10", height 2' 5", weight 60 lbs. Blanford gives a large skull as 8·7", basal length and 5·5" in zygomatic breadth. I tried in vain to shoot wolves in the hills between the Saseer Pass and the Shyok but could never get near them. Three wolves stood on a bare hill and watched; directly I moved they were off and when I followed them over a low hill, they watched me from the slopes of the main hill, and as soon as I showed myself, although I was lying prone on the ground, they galloped away. This occurred on the southern slopes of the Karakoram where probably the wolves had rarely seen a man.

#### The Indian Wolf.—*Canis pallipes*

Vernacular names—*Bheriya*, *Bagyar* and *Landga*.

Probably the best known name is *Bheriya* whilst *Langda* is the name in Gondwana.

*Colour.*—Grey with a very decided brownish hue; dark on the back—much browner than is *C. lupus*.

*Dimensions.*—Much smaller than *C. lupus* rarely exceeding 3 feet apud Blanford skull has 6·85" basal length, and 4·4" broad—weight from 40 to 45 lbs.

*Distribution.*—The plains of India, not ascending high into the Himalayas; at one time common in Abbottabad and Hazara, rare in the Punjab ranges, very rare in the Vale of Kashmir.

*Habits.*—Gregarious to a limited extent, possibly they would be more so, were they not continually being hunted down. Government is always on the watch to destroy wolves as they are very destructive and kill horses, cattle, sheep, goats or any live domestic animals they come across. Antelopes are systematically hunted by three or more wolves working in unison, whilst wolves which take to killing women and children are much to be dreaded.

The largest wolves I have seen dwelt in the open ground in front of the old Fort at Fatehgarh.

#### The Jackal.—*Canis aureus*

In vernacular—*Gidar*, *Shial* are probably the commonest names—*Shal* in Kashmir—*Hokol* in Gondwana—*Ihigal* according to

Blanford in Persia but this name is often used by Mahomedans. There are many names besides these. In parts of the C.P. 'Chota-Bagh' is often the name.

Near Rewah territory I was taken on an elephant for miles, in order to shoot a *Chota-Bagh*, which I naturally thought was a young tiger or a leopard. On arriving at a small village I knew that I had been sold; I was taken to a thorn bush and there was the 'Jack'. This was in May! However the information was correct; the headman said the *Bagh* eat their 'murghis'. I could not help laughing, much to the disgust of the mahout.

*Colour*.—Pale rufous—sometimes reddish. Albinos are very rare. Blanford mentions 'coal black'—often brown hairs on the back tipped with black.

*Dimensions*.—Jackals are often very large in Kashmir, where they are very destructive to sheep.

Head and body of a large jackal 31"—weight up to 25 lbs. a fine female weighed 19 lbs.—a male weighed 22 lbs.—both were killed in the winter.

*Distribution*.—Throughout India, ascending the hills to about 5,000' or more. A few days ago jackals were calling at 7,500' and I have known them to ascend to much higher elevations.

Jackals eat certain fruits notably *Zizyphus* (ber) also Indian corn. The vernacular name *Phial* is usually applied to the Jackal when frightened. The name *Phiaow* is also used, it is a mistake to think that these terms only apply to a 'Jack' which is frightened by a tiger or leopard as they will *Phiaow* even when pigs or bears or wild dogs are on the move.

### Genus—*Cyon*

#### The Indian Wild Dog—*Cyon dukhunensis*

The only Vernacular names I know are *Ram-Hun* (Kashmiri) and *Jungli Kutta*—*Ban Kutta*—*Bhansa*. *Bhansa* in the Eastern Himalayas.

*Colour*.—Red. I cannot call to mind ever seeing rufous grey or light brownish-grey (Blanford), but I have seen brownish-red wild dogs; there are sometimes dark tips to the hairs on the back. Lighter red below. The pups are sooty brown.

*Dimensions*.—Head and body 38", tail with hair 14"—weight 28 lbs.—heaviest known weight 32 lbs.

The habitat extends throughout India in forest land, ranging high up in the Himalayas. In parts of the upper Indus Valley it is fairly common, but is gradually being reduced in numbers. The wild dog is very rare in the Vale of Kashmir, I have not seen one for many years past, nor have I seen the skins in the shops except one or two from Baltistan.

*Habits*.—Gregarious and predatory, living on any animal killed. They hunt in packs and take Sambhar, Nilgai and all sorts of deer, while cattle, sheep, goats and ponies fall, easy victims to their rapacity. Even leopards are persecuted by wild dogs and compelled to take to trees for safety. They are often heard whilst

hunting at night and over and over again have I listened to them whilst lying awake in the jungles.

That wild dogs call when hunting is true as I have watched them at a few yards whilst doing so. When running by scent they only whimper, but when the prey is in sight and at hand, they often break into an undescrivable howl.

*Cyon dukhunensis* breed in colonies in burrows in soft ground, also in caves or holes amongst rocks, hunting the surrounding jungles. Having once found a colony, it is as well to set to work deliberately and smoke them all out. The young are probably smothered; those able to run about get into the surrounding grass and can be beaten out by a line of elephants. They are hard to hit with a bullet whilst dodging through the grass, and unless close, are still more difficult to kill with shot.

A colony was breeding within about a mile of a jungle where there were tigers. Strangely enough no foot prints of the dogs were to be seen in the vicinity and it was evident that they gave the big cats a wide berth and both refrained from interfering with each other.

The breeding season is in the winter months as a rule, but I have seen quite small pups in May.

The period of gestation is probably nine weeks.

#### The Indian Fox—*Vulpes bengalensis*

Vernacular names: *Lomri*—*Lom* in Hindustani, *Lomri* and sometimes *Lhal* in Jammu, *Kokri* and *Khakri* are names which are sometimes heard in Northern India; I have heard the name *Kokri* in the Punjab.

*Colour*.—From light to reddish-grey. Jerdon remarks, 'The fur just after it has assumed its winter coat is very beautiful, a pure grey in the body contrasting with the rufous limbs.'

I have often watched various foxes during the morning and evening hours and invariably remarked that early in the morning *Vulpes bengalensis* does not seem to be in the least hurry when moving off to the burrows. It is seldom that it is to be seen carrying food, homewards, but when so doing it proceeds very warily.

*Dimensions*.—Vary a good deal. Length, head and body 19 to 22" generally about 22"; tail 12" weight of a full-grown specimen 6 to 7 lbs.

*Distribution*.—According to Jerdon 'found throughout India' rare in forest countries. Blanford and others put the limit at 'not recorded west of Sind and the Punjab.' Personally the extreme west I have seen it is in the Jammu Province, Sialkote and adjacent localities.

#### The Common Fox—*Vulpes alopec*

Vernacular names: *Lomri*. *Laash* is not the Kashmiri name for the common fox, it is the name usually for any kind of cat. It is quite impossible to give any standard of *colour* to the Himalayan variety; go to any furriers shop and you will find pelts of almost any colouring. On the other hand *V. flavescens* is a superb fox of almost a universal yellow, often with a tinge of golden-rufous. The

weight given by Jerdon as 14 lbs. is fairly correct, but 18 lbs. has been recorded. The average weight of six male foxes is 12 lbs. The price of a pelt is about Rs. 25.

Turning to the Himalayan form. The colouring on the back varies from red and yellow, to dark grey and very rarely to black. The sides are pale. Ears are jet black outside. This portion of the skin is stitched together and made into collarets, fetching of course very high prices. The ears inside are generally buff. 'The face is rufous, there is a large black spot in front of the eye and the cheeks are white' (Blanford). Tail nearly always grey; the tip of the tail is white.

*Habits.*—These foxes dwell in burrows or amongst rocks at an elevation of 5,000' to about 8,000'. In the summer the cubs come out in the afternoon and play about on the swards of green turf; the vixen generally rests half hidden by some bushes and at the slightest sign of danger she utters a shrill bark repeating it at short intervals, finally if any of the cubs are too keen at their play, the mother races across the grass, the whole family following and they are soon lost to view. Probably none of them will be seen for some days. I have never seen the mother and cubs dart into their homes when frightened. Cubs will often play at the entrance of a cleft in rocks whilst the mother lies secreted under cover. Seldom more than five are produced at a birth and by August they are sufficiently well grown to be able to escape from most terriers.

#### The Small Tibetan Fox—*Vulpes ferrilatus*

Vernacular Names: *Igar* (Tibetan) according to Blanford. I have heard that name in Little Tibet. *Lokri* is the common name.

*Dimensions*: Head and body 19" to 20"; tail with hair 12".

*Habitat.*—Tibet, with a considerable distribution from the Northern Sulej to the East.

*Colour.*—Reddish-yellow, tail plain grey, tip of the tail pure white, breast and stomach pure white.

The pelts of this fox are not common in the furriers shops, but from time to time a certain number can be selected which are so much of one size, and approximately of the same colour, as to justify the placing them as belonging to a race of foxes which come from the same locality. The traders who bring down skins give but little help. I think *V. ferrilatus* comes from nearer to our borders than do other varieties of *V. alopec.*

(To be continued.)